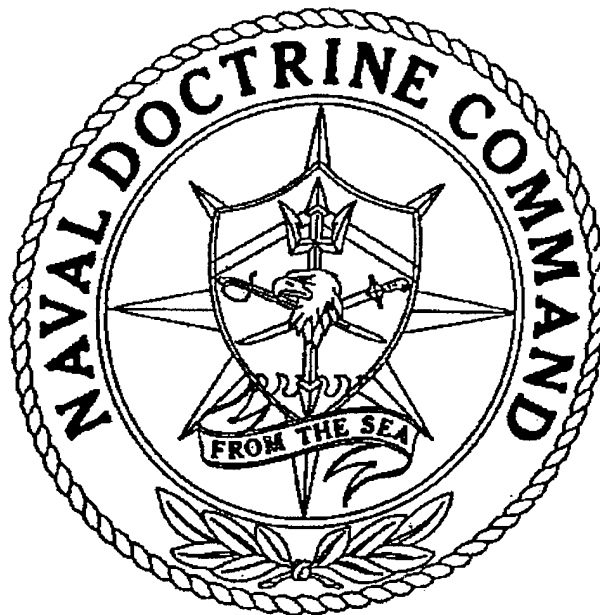


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NAVAL DOCTRINE COMMAND

Norfolk, Virginia



Winning the War in the Pacific: Doctrinal Lessons for
Today

by

Dr. James J. Tritten

April 1995

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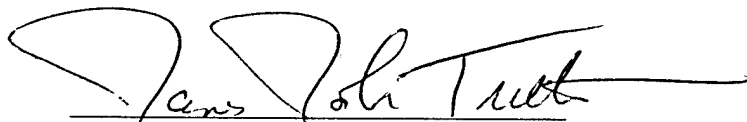
NAVAL DOCTRINE COMMAND
Norfolk Virginia

Rear Admiral F.L. Lewis
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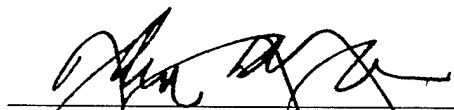
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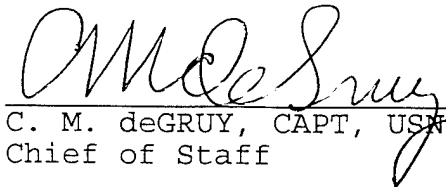
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Winning the War in the Pacific: Doctrinal Lessons for Today

by
Dr. James J. Tritten¹

With the passage of fifty years of time since the victory of Allied forces in World War II, we have had the opportunity to research and reflect upon the lessons of that great conflict--to determine which, if any lessons, are still relevant today. For navies today, there appears to be great value in reviewing the specific lessons of the war in the Pacific. Obviously the Pacific theater has an inherent maritime nature. The war was conducted both jointly as well as with a multinational dimension. The Pacific war had a series of defensive, counteroffensive, and offensive campaigns with interconnecting operations, battles, engagements, strikes and raids conducted at every level of warfare. The theater is also of interest due the use of formal written doctrine by both the U.S. Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy before and during that war. This report will address many of these issues and suggest that formal written navy doctrine aided the U.S. Navy in its contribution to our great national and Allied victory. This treatment will not be all-inclusive, but rather suggestive of the type of new research that is needed for naval doctrine development today.

Pre-War Planning

War Plan Orange and the subsequent Rainbow Plans have been thoroughly documented by the Naval Institute Press.¹ War Plan Orange called for a decisive battle between the Japanese and American battle fleets and a subsequent economic strangulation of Japan by blockade with attacks on the shore from the sea. As time went on, and this plan was revised with the Rainbow series, the essential concept was retained and gamed at the Naval War College in Newport, RI.² The basic concept of the coming war in the Pacific--decisive battle--became second nature to an entire generation of officers of the U.S. Naval Services. Consequently, we are not surprised that, during the war, Admiral William Halsey consistently sought out the Japanese battle fleet for a decisive battle of annihilation. Halsey's desire to meet the enemy paralleled that of the Japanese admirals who sought a repeat of their decisive victory over Russia at Tsushima in 1905.

What is less well known is that these war plans were based upon centralized written navy doctrine which established the

¹ The views expressed by the author are his alone and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. government, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Navy. The author would like to acknowledge the critical comments and suggestions received from Drs. Edward Marolda and Jeff Barlow at the Naval Historical Center.

basic concepts of operations that were expected of the fleet. The *War Instructions: United States Navy, 1934*, F.T.P. 143,³ was comprehensive doctrine of the type now once again being prepared by the U.S. Navy at the Naval Doctrine Command. It opened with a statement of the general functions of the Army and Navy in war--functions negotiated at the Joint Board. Missions to be accomplished were delineated in primary and secondary theaters of operations.

This Navy-wide doctrine was a part of a comprehensive series of operational-level and tactical-level publications which served to guide the U.S. Navy in combat. The *Current Tactical Orders and Doctrine: United States Fleet, 1941*, U.S.F. 10,⁴ supplemented the *War Instructions* and the *General Tactical Instructions, 1934*, F.T.P. 142,⁵ with tactical-level cruising instructions and general combat doctrine. Both the 1934 F.T.P. 143 and the 1941 U.S.F. 10 were revisions of previously issued similar doctrinal publications. There was a multitude of functional and platform-specific doctrine which complemented these Navy and fleet-wide publications. By the time World War II was declared, there was a fully mature, formal, and centralized system of doctrine in the U.S. Navy that gave guidance, but not directives, to the fleet commander on how to fight. That doctrine called for the engagement of the enemy by battleships in a decisive battle.

The Naval Defensive .

Despite its preference for how to fight, the reality of fleet capability after the attack on Pearl Harbor forced the U.S. Pacific Fleet to devise alternative doctrine--based upon the assumption of inferiority and the more demanding use of fleet assets other than battleships. For example, submarines were to conduct unrestricted warfare against all classes of maritime targets while on long-range independent patrols. Pre-war doctrine had trained commanding officers to be an integral part of the battle fleet, to attack naval targets from a position of concealment, and to neutralize the expected counter-attack. Submarine doctrine changed while the war progressed and we learned that maritime targets could be attacked and then re-attacked while operating on the surface.⁶

A war of attrition in the Pacific started with U.S. and Allied forces on the strategic, operational and tactical defensive. Units of the small U.S. Asiatic Fleet were integrated into a multinational American, British, Dutch, and Australian (ABDA) force. The ABDA force put up a gallant, but poorly coordinated, operational-level defense of the Netherlands East Indies (January - February 1942) against overwhelming odds. Coordination might have been better if there had been a multinational parallel to U.S. Navy doctrine. The importance of multinational navy doctrine today has not been lost on the U.S. Navy.

A series of highly successful raids by naval carrier forces were followed-up by the first check of the Japanese advance resulting from the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 1942). The results of the Coral Sea battle were, in part, a result of boldness and audacity on the part of Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, USN, who ordered an attack with forces that were weaker than those of the enemy--a concept not envisaged under current fleet doctrine. Clearly Admiral Fletcher knew when and how to deviate from published doctrine.

Japanese Vice Admiral Inouye Shigeyoshi fought at Coral Sea on the offensive primarily because pre-war doctrine in the Imperial Japanese Navy devoted only modest attention to the defensive, limiting the choices available to the commander in the field. Japanese doctrine had no developed concept for defense of their carrier battle forces, let alone the transports, in any other manner than an offensive strike against the enemy.⁷ Admiral Inouye fought in accordance with his doctrine--innovation by the on scene commander not being an appreciated talent in the Imperial Japanese Navy.

The Naval Counteroffensive

Although U.S. military forces blunted the Japanese operational-level advance against Midway (June 1942), we were initially unable to exploit this victory with an effective operational-level counter-offensive. U.S. commanders wanted to go on the counter-offensive and, in recognition of the vital importance of the South and Southwest Pacific island areas and the construction of an airfield on Guadalcanal, approved a "minor" operation to secure a base in the Eastern Solomon Islands. Major General Alexander Vandegrift landed his Marines to take on the defenders of Guadalcanal in tactical-level combat action. The Guadalcanal operation rapidly grew into what we may consider today as the most important naval operation of the Pacific war--the real turning point of the Pacific war.

The series of tactical-level naval engagements of Savo Island, the Eastern Solomons, Cape Esperance, Santa Cruz Islands, Guadalcanal, and Tassafaronga fought around Guadalcanal between August-November 1942 were classic navy battles of attrition in support of a naval operation to seize the airfield on Guadalcanal, which could be used by the U.S. to control the local seas and airspace. Without control, the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) supporting the marines and soldiers on Guadalcanal were vulnerable and the island might have to be abandoned. With control, naval and air forces staged from the base were able to interdict enemy SLOCs, thus undermining the enemy's positions on the island. This interrelationship of Navy ships at sea to Marines ashore is the essence of what we have

traditionally called the Navy-Marine Corps team and what we today term naval expeditionary warfare.

The failure of the U.S. Navy to initially support the Marines on Guadalcanal, to General Vandegrift's satisfaction, contributes to the Marines today retaining their own organic air and combat service support branches. The Navy and Marine Corps are working very hard today at trying to eliminate the seams between the amphibious and at-sea forces with new concepts for naval expeditionary forces and operational maneuver from the sea.

We learned many good lessons in the littoral waters off Guadalcanal. For example, our surface commanders persisted in forming battle columns, a prewar tactic in accordance with doctrine for daylight surface engagements but wholly unsuited for the night engagements forced on us by the enemy. Perhaps even more culpable was Rear Admiral Norman Scott's and Rear Admiral Daniel Callaghan's failure to exploit the tactical advantages afforded by our radar--pointing out the need to ensure that doctrine can and must change during a war.

The lessons learned from the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands and the loss of the carrier *Hornet* were cause for changes to Navy doctrine in the Pacific. The U.S. Pacific Fleet published an updated form of doctrine in June 1943--*Current Tactical Orders and Doctrine U.S. Pacific Fleet*, PAC-10,⁸ which superseded Navy and fleet-wide doctrine in the theater. PAC-10 made specific reference to lessons learned from the initial part of the war.

The engagements fought between the Allied and Japanese navies for Guadalcanal and the Solomons were perhaps the only time during the Pacific war that the two sea powers met each other as equals. Before then, the U.S. fought as the weaker force, but after securing Guadalcanal, the enemy was doomed. What had started out as a minor counter-offensive operation to seize an advance base grew into what we may now consider to be the decisive operation of the war. Never again would Japan go on the operational-level offensive in the Pacific.

With eventual command of the island and the sea and airspace around Guadalcanal in early 1943, the allied navies were able to ensure the safe sailing of supply ships and transports to General Douglas MacArthur's forces in Australia--an operational-level goal. This was also the year in which American industry and organizational abilities made the strategic difference in the war--we were able to outproduce the enemy and deliver the goods when and where they were needed.

The fighting on and around Guadalcanal permitted the Allies to gather and reorganize their forces and benefit from North American production. Its operational-strategic value has

generally been overlooked by many scholars who tend to focus on the tactical-level engagements won and lost by both sides. The fighting around Guadalcanal also had some beneficial, even if unintended, consequences for our allies--it upset previously approved Japanese plans for an offensive operation in the Bay of Bengal.

Admiral Mikawa Gun'ichi's failure to exploit his victory after the Battle off Savo Island (August 1942) has always seemed difficult to understand. He could have devastated the transports and, perhaps, changed the course of events in the Guadalcanal operation. In the past, Admiral Mikawa's actions were explained, in part, as a failure in Imperial Japanese Navy doctrine.⁹ More in-depth research reveals that the World War II Imperial Japanese Navy *Battle Instructions* clearly required the commander to take advantage of the exploitation phase of battle.¹⁰ If previous analyses of past battles have failed to include doctrine, then of what value are they?

The Naval Offensive

In the Southwest Pacific Area, General MacArthur and his amphibious commander, Rear Admiral Theodore Wilkinson, demonstrated the baseball concept of "hitting 'em where they ain't" during their occupation of Saidor, a lightly held village on the New Guinea north coast. This model was repeated throughout MacArthur's theater of operations and it retains utility today and forms the basis for what we now term "operational maneuver from the sea."

As General MacArthur's ground and air forces in the Southwest Pacific Area increased in size and capability, they were able to continue a series of operational-level joint and multinational campaigns which contributed to the overall strategic victory in the Pacific. MacArthur's brilliant mastery of the art of war left nearly 100,000 Japanese soldiers stranded in Rabaul where they were unable to engage anyone nor be withdrawn to rear areas.

The objectives of the Central Pacific campaign were to secure advanced island bases for naval forces and the strategic bombardment of Japan, to cut the sea lines of communication, and to stage the eventual invasion of Kyushu and Honshu if necessary. Loosely based upon War Plan Orange, the Central Pacific campaign supported and was supported by General MacArthur's drive to the Philippines and parallel submarine and air campaigns. The war in the Pacific was joint and multinational warfare of the first order.

A major naval offensive started later in 1943. The Japanese learned at the tactical-level engagement at Vella Gulf (August

1943) that we also could mass divided but mutually supporting forces. Commander Arleigh Burke had worked out plans for independent surface action based upon his study of the bold and innovative Scipio Africanus in the Second Punic War. Burke won his own success at the Battle of Cape St. George in November.

The Central Pacific campaign, under Admiral Chester Nimitz, kicked off with the reconquest of the Gilbert Islands. By now, the U.S. Pacific Fleet had new fast carriers. Rear Admiral Marc Mitscher's Task Force 58 demonstrated new techniques for combined arms warfare with the use of aircraft to attack and also flush out surface ships from the Truk anchorage (February 1944), where they would meet a trap of battleships and submarines. Vice Admiral Raymond Spruance's close support for the landings at Saipan, Tinian, and Guam (June 1944) earned him the gratitude of the Marines and soldiers in the amphibious force--who he did not abandon--and the eternal Monday morning quarterbacking of fellow commanders and historians ever since.

The Japanese commander at the Battle of the Philippine Sea (June 1944), Vice Admiral Ozawa Jisaburo, signaled to his ships that "The fate of the Empire depends on the issue of this battle; let every man do his utmost." This was the same signal sent by Admiral Tōgō Heihichirō to his fleet before the 1905 Battle of Tsushima. The Philippine Sea battle could have been the decisive battle of forces both operating on the offensive, sought by Ozawa, foreseen in War Plan Orange, and practiced on the floor of the Naval War College during the inter-War years.

Admiral Spruance, however, saw the virtue of fighting on the defensive, where it was to his advantage, and operated his carriers initially in a defensive posture at the Battle of the Philippine Sea.¹¹ Spruance had the benefit of the receipt of a copy of the Japanese battle plan, a full breakdown of their order of battle, and their current combat potential. He also obtained communications intercepts showing that they were executing the plan. Spruance anticipated the shuttle use of land bases by Japanese carrier-based aircraft and he ordered their destruction, thus preempting refueling and rearming by the enemy. Denied surprise and the shuttle mission, Mitscher was able to mass more fighters for defense than the Japanese could sortie on the offense.

Spruance's tactical intelligence advantage was so great that his carrier pilots were able to be vectored to specific enemy flight leaders in a brilliant demonstration of maneuver and combined arms warfare. The Marianas "Turkey Shoot" battle of annihilation ranks as one of the most decisive victories for U.S. naval aviation. Spruance had wisely ordered his submarine forces to execute an initial strike against enemy destroyers, before the main battle, that permitted successful subsequent submarine

strikes against the Japanese carrier fleet with the resulting loss of two enemy heavy carriers.

Within weeks of the Battle of the Philippines Sea, U.S. Navy service forces were able to replace all of the aircraft lost in the battle, whereas Japan went into the subsequent Battle of Leyte Gulf (October 1944) with only a shadow of her former strength and still having not figured out how to coordinate their forces. Despite the problems with U.S. command and control during the Leyte Gulf campaign, the Japanese had more disastrous difficulties of their own. During the Leyte campaign, four Japanese admirals were at sea and two others were ashore, all within 100 miles radius, but each fought separate and virtually uncoordinated engagements--a failure in doctrine. Whereas the problems with U.S. command and control caused undue loss of life, for the Japanese Navy, they also signalled its demise.

Of course Admiral Spruance's decision to remain and protect the invasion force during the Philippine Sea battle, instead of exploiting his victory led, in part, to the decision by Admiral Halsey off Cape Engaño during the Battle of Leyte Gulf to not stay with the invasion force but instead seek out the enemy's carriers. Halsey is doomed to be remembered for this decision rather than his many victories.

Pre-war and World War II-era U.S. Navy doctrine was essentially silent on how to best protect an amphibious objective area--distant decisive battle against the enemy battle fleet or remaining in close and fighting on the defensive. One could easily conclude that Spruance had it right and Halsey needlessly endangered the success of the overall operation by attempting to sub-optimize with a tactical-level victory. In any case, this issue illustrates that, no matter how well thought-out is doctrine, it will never address all factors in warfare.

The problems associated with navies supporting, and not supporting, ground forces ashore is a constant theme in historical literature. A careful review of history reveals that this is a central doctrinal issue that has been faced by navies for hundreds of years, regardless of technology, flags flown, or geographic location of the battles.¹² As with many doctrinal issues, there are enduring questions but transient answers. The U.S. Navy is addressing those enduring doctrinal issues today.

By mid/late-1943, the U.S. had massed vastly superior forces against the scattered islands tactically defended by the Japanese. The ensuing multi-pronged attacks by fast carrier and amphibious forces tasked the Japanese defenders beyond their ability to respond effectively. The drive through the Gilbert, Marshall, Western Caroline, and Marianas Islands, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa and the decisive operational-strategic-level victory at

the Battle of the Philippine Sea permitted the U.S. to dominate the Pacific theater leading to the eventual defeat of Japan.

The Victory

Fleet Admiral Ernest King's "Introduction" to his "Third and Final Report to the Secretary of the Navy: Covering the Period 1 March 1945 to 1 October 1945" implies that the U.S. Navy essentially won the war in the Pacific while allied ground and air forces essentially won the war against Germany.¹³ Admiral King stated that "Japan lost the war because she lost command of the sea, and in doing so lost--to us--the island bases from which her factories and cities could be destroyed by air," thus acknowledging that air power had a significant role in the victory as well. Admiral King recognized the roles of naval, as well as land-based air power, in the destruction of Japan from the air.

There has been an age-old search for, and claims of, a direct influence by navies on the outcome of a war--whose ultimate resolution has usually been on the land by a man with a gun. A similar, but less age-old, claim has been offered by air power proponents. The U.S. Air Force generally implies that it was the strategic offensive air campaign--specifically its nuclear phase and the mining of Japanese home waters--that really decided the issue of war and peace against Japan. This view essentially would limit the naval contribution to that of a supporting role of ensuring that the bombers got within striking range. The Air Force says that air power ended the war--much as they argued during the Cold War that nuclear weapons would decisively end another war.

Similarly, the U.S. Navy submarine force often suggests that submarines attained most or all of the war-winning objectives by themselves--without any acknowledgement of the role that the battle fleet played in keeping Japanese naval forces tied up from hunting the submariners. Excessive claims by the submarine service were rebutted a few years ago by Admiral Vladimir Chernavin, the former Soviet Navy chief, who documented the lack of impact on Japanese industrial war-related output from the actions taken by U.S. submarines. Admiral Chernavin wrote¹⁴ that American sea lines of communications efforts against Japan, however successful in terms of numbers of ships destroyed, only managed by 1945 to reduce the rate of increase of Japanese military production.

Of course the Soviet Union claimed that they won the war in the Pacific during their lightning-speed Manchurian Operation. Although we in the West tend to make light of this claim, Admiral King was in error in the "Introduction" to his "Third and Final Report to the Secretary of the Navy: Covering the Period 1 March

1945 to 1 October 1945" when he said that "Japan's armies were intact and undefeated." Those armies had suffered at the hands of U.S. Marines, Army soldiers, and the ground and air forces of our allies throughout the long war in the Pacific. The bulk of the overseas deployed ground forces of Japan were still in Manchuria and were decisively defeated by the Soviet Union. In the Manchurian operation, the Soviet Union achieved strategic, operational, and tactical surprise against the Japanese. Whether that defeat had any impact on the decision by Japan to end the war is problematic.

The subject of who really won the war against Japan has been debated in the literature for decades. Naturally it is complicated by a desire to not minimize the tremendous contribution made by all soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines in all the nations which fought against Japan. The records of the minutes of the Japanese Privy Council, where the question of surrender was decided, strongly suggest that it was the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki--specifically--that caused the emperor to overrule his military and to personally order that the war be ended on terms that the military did not consider to be acceptable. Since the emperor never made any further clarification of these minutes, they are the best source of information that we have of decision-making during a nuclear war preceded by a series of important conventional defeats.

Against an island nation, it is probably not essential to actually occupy territory in order to defeat an enemy. Power against centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities can be brought from the sea and air against such vulnerable opponents in a manner that would cause them to cease hostilities and allow us to impose our will. Such lessons are equally valid today.

The U.S. Pacific Fleet was unable to get a decisive battle and was forced to fight a battle of attrition over time, although the Battle of the Philippine Sea and the Marianas "Turkey Shoot" come very close to what we would define as an actual decisive battle of annihilation.

There was no one single decisive weapons system or campaign, but rather it was the ability of the Allies and, in particular, the U.S. to outproduce the enemy and organize a method of transport that would mass forces to overwhelm an enemy that was simply outclassed. The Imperial Japanese Navy proved itself incapable of learning and changing during the war.¹⁵ They were doomed to attempt to repeat their basic doctrine of warfare against Russia in 1905--strike first and then await the decisive battle between main battle fleets. A study of the war in the Pacific is extremely instructive today.

Lessons for Today.

Before the war, U.S. Navy, Marine, and Army officers had completed a vision of their future battlespace after careful study of the situation. The U.S. armed forces had prepared for this coming war in their doctrine. They wargamed and exercised their expected actions in combat, refined the doctrine over time, and were generally as combat ready as they could be--given the state of preparedness that the governments provided.

Doctrine changed during the war. Some lessons were learned the hard way. The point is that, as lessons were learned, the U.S. Navy codified those lessons in the form of written doctrine designed to help the fleet fight smarter and win the war. The *General Tactical Instructions* were revised and reissued in 1942. PAC-10 was issued during June 1943. The Commander-in-Chief of the United States Fleet revised and reissued the *War Instructions* in November 1944.¹⁶ Doctrine was not stagnant during the war.

Not all of the lessons that we learned were learned alone. We have certainly come a long way in the preparation of multinational doctrine and learned from the blood-soaked history of our past defeats in the early days of World War II and the waters off Java. Today, as we downsize the Navy, multinational navy doctrine is vitally important if we are to retain any ability to achieve operational-level and strategic-level goals in the maritime environment.

A review of the World War II-era doctrine reveals a great deal of wisdom in its creators understanding the nature of combat that they would face and in providing guidance to the fleet. Today, as the dominant sea power, we would prefer to likewise deal with a future enemy surface fleet (if one were to emerge) in one decisive battle. We must also, however, be prepared for attrition warfare over time.

In the "Foreword" to PAC-10, the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, stated that the document was "...not intended and shall not be construed as depriving any officer exercising tactical command of initiative in issuing special instructions to his command...the ultimate aim is to obtain essential uniformity without unacceptable sacrifice of flexibility." In the body of PAC-10, the Pacific Fleet Commander-in-Chief further stated that: (1), "it is impractical to provide explicit instructions for every possible combination of task force characteristics and tactical situations;" (2), "attacks of opportunity are necessarily limited by the peculiarities of each situation, by the judgment of subordinate commanders, and by the training they have given their personnel;" and (3), "no single rule can be formulated to fit all contingencies."¹⁷ These are good words to live by today as well.

Notes

1. Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1991. By the Spring of 1941, the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet had been instructed to prepare his own supporting plan, WPPac-46, which was signed out on 25 July 1941.
2. For an extremely well-researched analysis of the interaction between the Naval War College and doctrine development, see: Mark Allen Campbell, "The Influence of Air Power Upon the Evolution of Battle Doctrine in the U.S. Navy, 1922-1941, unpublished Master's Thesis, Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts, History Department, December 1992, p. 93-145.
3. Admiral W.H. Standley, U.S. Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, *War Instructions: United States Navy, 1934*, F.T.P. 143, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942 [reprint], signed March 28, 1934.
4. Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, U.S. Navy, *Current Tactical Orders and Doctrine: United States Fleet, 1941*, U.S.F. 10, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942, signed at Pearl Harbor, HI, November 25, 1941.
5. Admiral W.H. Standley, U.S. Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, *General Tactical Instructions, 1934*, F.T.P. 142, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934.
6. Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military*, Ithaca, NY and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 130-147 details the particularly difficult method that the U.S. Navy's submarine forces learned during the war in the Pacific.
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